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## THE MODERNIST THEORY OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

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MODERNISM as a theological movement is the result of a philosophy, or perhaps of a number of different philosophical systems. But any system of philosophy or metaphysics, if it is to claim any validity or truth must rest upon a theory of knowledge. Modernist theology can claim no exemption from the necessity of a critical theory of knowledge; it cannot say—here is my theology, here is the philosophy at its basis, and then try to escape a theory of knowledge which can justify its fundamental principles.

Nor does Modernism usually in its best representatives attempt to avoid such a theory of knowledge. On the contrary it proclaims such a theory and when we examine it, we find it to be the anti-intellectualism which has been so predominant in religious thought since Kant and Schleiermacher, and which still seems to dominate in America, though signs are not wanting, as Professor Brunner of Zurich has indicated, that this wave of anti-intellectualism in many quarters has reached its height and is beginning to wane. As long as it is supposed to support religious life and even belief, it is popular; but when its logical results in scepticism as to the objects of religious beliefs and the validity of these beliefs are clearly seen, then enthusiasm for it begins to cool and questions begin to arise as to whether we can dethrone the intellect, banish it from religion, and retain any objectively valid religious faith.

In the present crisis, it is well for the Christian Church to know what Modernism is in its fundamental principles.

One of its underlying principles is the denial of any external authority in religious knowledge, and the assertion that religion and Christianity are a life, not a doctrine. The outcry against authoritative doctrine is not new of course. It has been fashionable for years. To realize this one need only recall the dispute between Dreyer and Professor Kaftan of Berlin in 1888-90, and then turn to the recent remarks on the subject by Professor Wernle in his "Introduction to the Study of Theology", in 1921. It has been said and is being said that all doctrine is dead and constitutes too heavy a burden for religion to bear. One would not need to take this outcry against doctrine very seriously, as Professor Ihmels of Leipsic once said, if it came only from those

terial matters. But there is one miracle that I can't believe, and that is that the Bible is not the Word of God. The fundamental question is *Am I dealing with God?* In that case use the right instrument; your instrument—which is keener than a two-edged sword—is the Word of God.

E. V. D.

### WHY I BELIEVE THE OLD TESTAMENT\*

Of course, I hold all the accepted reasons for believing the Bible to be true. It is recognized that it is the only book that claims to be the Word of God, and its character indicates its supernatural source.

The Bible gives the best philosophical explanation of the Universe. I prefer the philosophy approved by Paul and Athanasius and Augustine and Anselm and Butler as a reasonable ground for man to act upon. No man today, *without revelation*, knows anything more about God than Plato did. An old Professor at Berlin used to say that all the philosophers since have not produced anything equal to Plato. As Addison said (in "Kato")—"Plato, thou reasonest well". But while he said that he believed in God, he added that, if we were to know anything about Him, He Himself must send a messenger to teach us. There is only one *theology*, and it is God-made and God-given. We have no right to call these man-made systems "theology"—they are anthropology; and I can make my own anthropology.

I've been teaching textual criticism of the Old Testament for about forty years—and not to dull fellows either, but to men preparing for their higher degree. In teaching, if we find a difficulty, I have my students go straight to the Hebrew Manuscripts, to the Massoretic notes, to the Greek version, so that they can testify at first hand that today the Old Testament is substantially what it was in the time of Christ. Scientifically considered, there is no doubt that we have today substantially the same Hebrew Bible that was used by Christ and his apostles and to which they gave their approbation.

Recently, a young professor brought out a book about the Old Testament. It was a compilation of the opinions of the men who thought like himself, which he called his "authorities". He never cited the Old Testament text as an authority, but only other radical writers. We sometimes forget that the Bible itself is an authoritative fact in evidence.

There are those who are throwing dust into the people's eyes and giving out the impression that you can't depend on the English version or the Hebrew original of the Old Testament. Either they mean to deceive or they do not know what they are

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\*Notes from addresses of Professor Robert Dick Wilson, Ph.D., LL.D., given under auspices of the Bible League in Great Britain in 1925.

talking about. There has never been a version, made in good faith, but has contained the plan of salvation and the great doctrines of the church "sufficient unto salvation for everyone that believeth".

In the last thirty years, we have discovered so many original documents that such theories as Wellhausen's and the like are entirely out of date. In 1882 a magazine was started in Germany that was a great protagonist of the Wellhausen theory. A couple of years ago they issued a prospectus announcing a new series of this Magazine of Old Testament Science, saying "What we forty years ago thought to be a science of Old Testament criticism, we have now found not to have been science at all, and it will be the endeavor of this review to reconstruct, if possible, a new science of Old Testament criticism".

The Hebrew Bible is all right, but the trouble is with the would-be interpreters. I don't pretend to understand everything in the Old Testament; but I am interested in knowing that we have the original text to interpret. Here is a Professor who goes on commenting until he gets stuck on something he can't translate or understand; then he says, "There's something the matter here with this text, and so we'll change it to read something that we can understand". Well, if examinations were conducted in that way, every student would always get one hundred percent.

For years I was hunting a way of showing that we could *get back* of the Greek translation of the Third century (Septuagint) in our scientific confirmation of the Old Testament Hebrew text; finally I struck on the *proper names*, especially the proper names of the Kings, more particularly those that are mentioned not only in the Old Testament text but also on their own monuments or on monuments contemporaneous with the Kings mentioned. I found there were 41 names of Kings which are mentioned either on their own monuments or on monuments contemporaneous with themselves. These forty-one names contain 191 Hebrew consonants. I found that out of those 191 consonants used in our present Hebrew text in writing those names of the 41 Kings, there are only two or three about which there could be any controversy as to their being proper renditions of the original names. Yet it is not to be expected that proper names should be handed down correctly. To transmit properly, proper names, for thousands of years, is one of the most wonderful phenomena in connection with historical documents.

For example, there are a number of Egyptian Kings mentioned in the Old Testament—Shishak, Neco, etc.; you will find that those names have been handed on letter by letter in the manuscripts. The Assyrian Kings—such as Sargon, Shalmaneser and Sennacherib—you will again find have their names spelled in the Hebrew Bible text in every case with absolute accuracy.

Perhaps the most marvelous case of all is that of Xerxes—a contemporary of and named by Herodotus. Yet you could never

transliterate Xerxes into the form of Ahasuerus, found in the Old Testament Hebrew text. As spelled in the Bible, (Ahasuerus), Xerxes is nearer to the original form on the Persian monuments, as spelled by Xerxes himself, than you will find anywhere else. How did some Hebrew writer of the second century B. C., writing in Palestine, get Ahasuerus out of Xerxes? I was mentioning the above facts to a certain Professor, and he said that the name of Xerxes alone was enough to confound all the critics. In the Bible it has been handed down all these millenniums correctly. The writers of the Hebrew Bible were for some reason able to spell the proper names of all the Kings of Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and Persia correctly; they spelled the names of the Egyptian kings just as the Egyptian kings themselves spelled them; they spelled the names of the Assyrian kings with the same accuracy. Yet, proper names are more easily changed than any other words; you will find more mistakes of transmission of proper names than anywhere else.

Secondly: the Bible gives the names of these kings in their *proper chronological order*, from all these various countries—nine or ten of them. Synchronously the Bible gives every king his right and proper place in the scheme of Old Testament history. What is the explanation for such accuracy. The writers would have to read Egyptian and Assyrian and Babylonian and Persian, and have access to all original sources, to write such a history. Yet, what I have been saying about Assyria was not known from 612 B. C., when Nineveh was destroyed, until less than a century ago. Nobody on earth knew how to spell the names of those Assyrian kings. No Greek document gives us the names of these Assyrian kings. Yet when these documents that had been buried for 2,500 years are unearthed and brought to light and read, we find our old friends Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmaneser, Sargon, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. Is it not a wonderful thing?

There is no man today who knows enough to attack successfully our Old Testament Hebrew text. A Professor does not know anything more about an ancient document without having studied it than you do yourself. A Professor can only know about an ancient document by learning the script of it, by learning the language in which that document is written, and by studying dictionaries, grammars, translations, and all that. If a Professor has not studied those ancient documents and languages he is absolutely unqualified to testify on the matter.

One more point is the *historical accuracy* of the Old Testament, as evidenced by the foreign words embedded in the texts written at different periods—like the raisins in your tea-cakes. In what may be termed the pre-patriarchal period, before Abram left Ur of the Chaldees and journeyed westward to Canaan, you find words of Babylonian and Sumerian origin; in the Egyptian period of bondage, while naturally there remain traces of the former, foreign words of Egyptian origin predominate; in the

Palestinian period of the Conquest and of the Judges you have practically the pure Hebrew—which was spoken in Palestine long before the time of Moses—though there is one word of probably Philistine origin; in the fourth period, that of the Kings, are found words of Armenian and Hittite origin, and especially Aramaic; fifth, the Assyro-Babylonian period, from Tiglath-Pileser to Nebuchadnezzar, is marked by foreign words from that source; sixth, Persian period—the only Old Testament books surely having Persian words being those which, according to the Scriptures themselves, were certainly written in Persian times.

E. V. D.

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### KNOWING THE TRUTH\*

E. Van Deusen

#### I. *Some Premises as to Knowledge.*

*Basic Truths the Ground of all Thought and Action:*

A basic fact or idea underlies and is implied in our every act and utterance. Behind and beneath both—recognized or not—are certain so-called “premises” that are the starting-point of all rational thinking in every field. Indeed, there are premises perforce assumed by anyone who would deny them; so, any conclusion of thought that contradicts, directly or indirectly, such fundamental premises of thought is plainly senseless.

##### (a) *Rationality:*

We unavoidably premise that we are *rational* beings; to deny this is to affirm one’s irrationality and hence the folly of his words. But, rational beings must think according to the laws of rational, orderly thought. Whoever starts with true premises and thinks according to these laws will reach true conclusions or knowledge—which is the manifest end or purpose of rationality. A conclusion that holds the impossibility of real knowledge, or that is insufficient and inadequate, or that is self-contradictory, is plainly irrational and false.

##### (b) *Personality and Objective Reality:*

The pre-requisite condition of all knowledge is Consciousness. To deny its reality thereby affirms it; plainly, one can’t know without conscious knowing.

Human consciousness testifies to the reality of two prime facts—the existence of *Self* and of *Not-self*, nor can consciousness be otherwise convinced by any amount of adverse and seeming argument. One’s self, as distinct from and yet the essential common

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\*This initial paper treats of (a) Some Premises regarding Knowledge, (b) Meaning of Truth and Knowledge, with certain Corollaries regarding Truth, (c) Some designations of Truth, (d) Truth and Personal Opinions. Following will be the Means of Knowledge, the Tests of Truth, etc.